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Suffering in Motion: Mobility Strategies of Mexicans Deported from the United States

AGNIESZKA RADZIWINOWICZÓWNA
University of Wolverhampton, United Kingdom
Centre of Migration Research, University of Warsaw, Poland
A.Radziwinowiczowna@wlv.ac.uk

Abstract. Since the beginning of this century we have witnessed the development of studies critically analyzing deportation and deportability. However, little is known about the post-deportation trajectories of deportees. This can be better understood by employing a comprehensive typology of post-deportation strategies of mobility. This article analyzes the case of Mexicans deported from the United States and draws on ethnography among former deportees in Oaxaca. Post-deportation mobility anticipates or stems from the absences and suffering experienced by the deported people. It is a form of mobility that is often an example of agency and resistance, especially in the context of unauthorized return to the United States.

Keywords: absence; agency; deportation; immobility; Mexico; mobility; resistance; suffering.

Introduction

“What would you do if you were me?” Fidel asked after telling me about his deportation, the separation from his children, and his plan to go back to the United States. He first migrated to the U.S. without authorization in 1990, at the age of 15, to work and provide economic support for his parents and siblings in Mexico. Five years later he was able to buy a house for himself in his hometown, San Ángel. Back in his village, he met and married 14-year-old Amada. In 1996, the couple traveled to Iowa, again without papers. A year later their first son, Eneas, was born and they decided to buy a house there. Although they initially envisaged their transnational mobility as temporary, the birth of their child led them to consider their migration as permanent. Their second son, Zacarías, was born in 1999, and Noemí followed ten years later.

Fidel was aware that adjustments to his immigrant status would be beneficial for his family, so he hired an immigration attorney. However, he fell victim to an immigration scam whereby his status was eventually disclosed to the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), which in turn ordered his removal. He fought this order for ten years, but in 2010 he was deported. Amada and their children followed him to Mexico. Amada was not formally deported, but together with their children she experienced de facto deportation (Boehm, 2016). Eneas, Zacarías and Noemí were “returning” to a place they were not from, to a country where they were “aliens.”

The family moved into the house Fidel had bought in 1995. Back in their hometown, Fidel and Amada opened different businesses, investing their modest savings. They sent the boys to local schools, but they had difficulties with the Spanish-language education. Peers abused 13-year-old Eneas. He decided to return to Iowa and 11-year-old Zacarías chose to follow him. Fidel and Amada transferred their parental rights to Fidel’s brother and sister-in-law, both U.S. citizens, who hosted the boys.

Fidel and Amada were devastated by the separation from their sons. They moved to the border city of Piedras Negras and asked Eneas and Zacarías to move down there and go to school in Texas, but the boys refused. After six months in Piedras Negras, the couple went back to San Ángel again.

In 2012, a year and a half after Fidel’s deportation, the couple talked to me about their suffering and how they worried about raising their adolescent sons transnationally. Amada admitted she regretted having left the U.S. As an unskilled worker and parent of minors who were U.S. citizens, she did not have the ability to legally return to the U.S. so they debated returning to Iowa without authorization. That is when Fidel asked me what I would do if I were him.

During the past 15 years, the United States deported nearly five million people (U.S. Department of Homeland Security 2016, 103, FY 2000–2015). More people were deported under the Barack Obama administration than any other, and large numbers of detentions and deportations look set to continue in the years to come. Donald Trump’s anti-immigration promises were important during his presidential campaign and the media are currently reporting on numerous and violent detentions, including workplace raids, not seen under Obama.

There is human suffering behind these numbers. Deportation is far more emotional than voluntary return migration, and according to psychological research, deportees suffer more than voluntary returnees (Fernández-Niño, Ramírez Valdés, Cerecero-García, & Bojorquez-Chapela, 2014). As the case of Fidel’s family shows, deportation entails profound multi-dimensional suffering because it uproots families from their social environments, separates family members, and causes economic hardships. As I explain below, Sayad’s sociology of *The Suffering of the Immigrant* can help us understand the experiences of deportees.

Stories like that of Fidel and Amada provide an example of how mobile deportees are, despite nation-states’ preference for immobilizing them. The U.S. imposes re-entry bars on deportees and criminalizes “previously removed aliens” if they return. Mexico, as a country which receives about 65% of all deportees from the United States, encourages these individuals to go back to their hometowns in order to prevent overcrowding in its border towns. The goal of this study is to explain what (im)mobility means to former deportees and why they are (im)mobility. I argue that different strategies of post-deportation mobility often serve to prevent or attenuate deportation-related suffering.

This article is structured as follows: first, I provide a review of studies on post-deportation mobility and then go on to outline my approach to this subject, which is inspired by Sayad’s sociology of migration. In the third section I present the design of my ethnographic research and in the fourth I describe four post-deportation mobility strategies. Finally, in the last part of the article, I summarize the main conclusions.

Post-deportation suffering and mobility

Authors who have worked with former deportees agree that deportation often brings about suffering — both for the deportee and his/her significant others (Peutz, 2010). Boehm (2016, p. 144) writes that deportation of one person “means that loss and suffering will alter a family and their future lives indefinitely.” Authors describe deportees’ separation from the rest of the

family as depressing (Talavera, Núñez-Mchiri & Heyman, 2010), causing “devastation” and “loss” (Boehm, 2016). Although often stigmatized as former offenders (Peutz, 2010; Schuster & Majidi, 2015), deportees might themselves become victims after removal to countries with high levels of violence, such as Mexico (Boehm, 2011), Somalia (Peutz, 2010), Afghanistan (Schuster & Majidi, 2013), Mali (Lecadet, 2013), or El Salvador (Coutin, 2010; Gonzales, 2013; Zilberg, 2011). Fear of violence in their place of origin can motivate people to return to the deporting country or head for safer places (Boehm, 2011).

Although the scholarship on deportation provides examples of mobile subjects (Lecadet, 2013; Peutz, 2010), scholars have not paid much attention to post-deportation mobility. In this article I present post-deportation strategies, focusing on the agentic aspect of mobility undertaken and the innovation it brings to the situation of a former deportee (i.e., whether he/she returns). When these two dimensions are taken into account, we can discern four situations that are a consequence of mobility. I call them: 1) “return to pre-deportation”; 2) “remaining in liminality”; 3) “return to pre-migration”; and 4) “a new beginning.” These can be succinctly defined as follows: “Return to pre-deportation” is mobility to the deportation country, i.e., the U.S. “Remaining in liminality” consists of resigning from mobility to the U.S. or to the hometown and living in an extended temporal and uncertain family and labor situation. “Return to pre-migration” means mobility to a place where the deportee lived before migrating to the United States. Finally, what I call “a new beginning” is mobility to a place where the migrant has not lived before and the reorganization of one’s life, as in the case of Fidel and Amada and their mobility to Piedras Negras.

Table 1
Post-deportation strategies, own elaboration

		Agentic?	
		yes	no
Return?	yes	Return to pre-deportation	Return to pre-migration
	no	A new beginning	Remaining in liminality

Sayad’s “total sociology of immigration” (Saada, 2000) is useful for the analysis of post-deportation for two reasons. First, because it underscores the importance of studying both immigration and emigration, as well as their consequences for individuals and communities (Sayad, 2004). Although these consequences have long been acknowledged in migration studies, deportation scholarship fails to explore the consequences of either **forced emigration** from the deporting country (here, the U.S.) or **forced**

immigration (here, Mexico). In the study of post-deportation it is necessary to analyze the consequences of both involuntary departure from the U.S. and involuntary arrival in Mexico, without assuming that deportation is an unproblematic “return back home” for the expelled people (Boehm, 2016).

Categorizations are used to classify mobility toward one’s place of origin as a “return.” The deportees from San Ángel, especially those who lived in the U.S. with their families, refer to a “return” when speaking of their unlikely U.S.-ward movement. For people like Amada and Fidel (and even more for their children), the U.S. is the reference point, and deportation is considered forced migration from Iowa to Oaxaca. Peutz (2010, p. 390) writes that: “In addition to experiencing at least some degree of corporeal subjection during their removal and upon their return to their purported homeland, many deportees are ‘returned’ to a certain place and time in such a way that it can never be a homecoming for them, only another arrival.” Without wishing to impose an interpretation upon the participants of my study, I refer to two strategies as “a return”: movement to the place where an individual resided before deportation (United States) and to a place where an individual lived prior to migration to the United States (a place in Mexico, not necessarily San Ángel). In transnational communities like those formed by the Mixtec in Mexico and the U.S. (Besserer & Kearney, 2006; Smith, 2006) people do not return to places, but rather to situations or conditions.

The second inspiration I draw from Sayad’s sociology is his explanation of the links between migration and suffering. As I will explain, post-deportation strategies aim to attenuate the suffering that follows deportation. Suffering is a subjective human experience of deep emotional distress caused by unbearable social conditions. While Sayad focuses on the emotions of the individual, I would like to place my analysis in the framework of the anthropology of suffering. This highlights that the psychological experience of suffering pertains not only to individuals, but also to social groups, and is an outcome of an interplay of different types of power (Kleinman, Das, & Lock, 1997) or violence (Farmer, 1997; Scheper-Hughes, 1998) and how these are exercised over people’s lives. However, deporting states naturalize the social suffering of the removed people through the use of racist discourses about breaking immigration laws, making them responsible for the consequences of removal.

Deportees suffer from their absences in the country they lived in, and they often find themselves unable to fully participate in the country they are forcefully expelled to. Sayad’s (2004) approach to the condition of a migrant is helpful in understanding the position of a deportee, her/his suffering, and decisions concerning post-deportation strategies of mobil-

ity. According to Sayad, the experience of migrants is marked by “double absence.” First, migrants are absent in the country they are expelled from, separated from loved ones, and painfully feel the guilt of their absence there. Second, although physically present in the country where they arrive, they feel absent there too, since they are unable to fully develop in all the spheres of life due to symbolic and structural violence. Following Sayad’s guidelines, I will analyze the suffering related to both forced migration from the United States and to San Ángel. Mexican deportees are separated from the families and towns they left behind in the United States. In Mexico, their country of arrival and origin, former deportees also become victims of exclusion, as they are stigmatized and their participation in the social and the economic spheres can be limited by the “stayers.”

Field site and methods

I carried out my fieldwork in San Ángel (the name of the pueblo and of the interviewees are pseudonyms), a rural municipality in Oaxaca, in the peripheral region of Mixteca Baja. Intensive, initially masculinized, U.S.-ward migration started in San Ángel in the 1980s. At the beginning of the 21st century, it was rare to find any men in San Ángel who had not participated in unauthorized migration to the United States. However, because of increasingly strict immigration and border controls in the first decade of the 21st century, unauthorized migration to the U.S. became more difficult and some deported migrants returned to their hometown.

In San Ángel, I contacted all the deported individuals I knew about from information-rich people in the pueblo. During my fieldwork I carried out participant observation and collected the life stories of 27 formerly deported individuals (23 men and four women). The majority of the deportees in San Ángel were men in their thirties; 12 had families there. Discounting those individuals who were apprehended and deported during a border-crossing attempt, 21 persons in my “sample” had lived in the U.S. for between six and 25 years. The deportees in San Ángel had diverse and strong ties to the U.S., and often, like Fidel, envisaged their future there. The suffering triggered by deportation may be more painful for them than for the less established immigrants (Boehm, 2016).

Being deported is often interpreted as a failure and experienced as embarrassing (Schuster & Majidi, 2015), so it was particularly important to establish a rapport based on trust. I walked alongside or shadowed the former deportees (Patrick, 2012), frequenting the events where they socialized, such as football matches or weddings. Walking alongside these individuals in San Ángel not only allowed me to be visible to them and

to gain their confidence, but it was also a way to carry out non-intrusive observation of their post-deportation lives. I frequently visited the houses of the former deportees in San Ángel and conducted numerous brief, informal conversations with them. Sometimes I helped them with their work. I also befriended some of their family members (wives or common-law wives of six men and the children of one), which contributed to a triangulation of perspectives in this research (Flick, 2007). A “vast array of promiscuous techniques and messy encounters, with ‘data’ often culled from the most unlikely and improbable sources” (Shore, 1999, p. 27) allowed me to better understand their post-deportation experiences and the motives that shaped their mobility strategies.

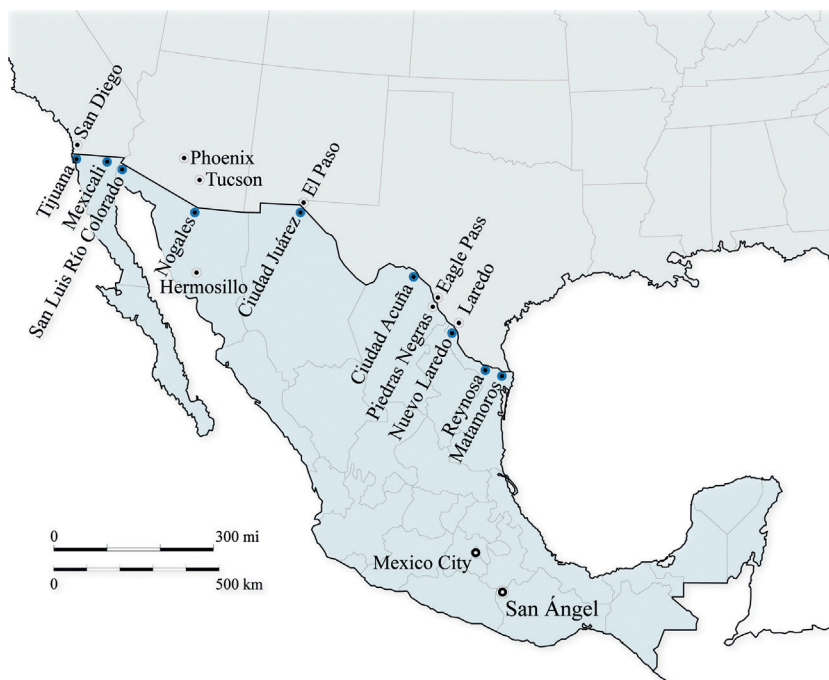
Researching post-deportation mobility strategies calls for longitudinal research in order to follow the post-deportation trajectories of the former deportees. Three research residences and three sets of interviews with former deportees allowed me to track changes in their trajectories over a period of six years (2012-2018). I carried out three fieldwork residencies in San Ángel: between March and July 2012, December 2013 and January 2014, and in April 2018. Moreover, I collected their life stories so that I could reconstruct what happened to them after their deportation.

I carried out all the interviews with the former deportees in San Ángel, and hence the individuals who did not return to the pueblo and remained there at the time of my fieldwork are underrepresented in the research. It was not my intention to quantify post-deportation strategies of mobility, but rather to present the spectrum of these strategies and to understand the mechanisms that underpin them.

Post-deportation strategies of mobility

All the individuals who participated in this research were deported to Mexican border cities. U.S. authorities deport Mexicans to nine cities: Matamoros, Reynosa, Nuevo Laredo, and Ciudad Acuña on the eastern section of the border, Ciudad Juárez and Nogales in the center, and San Luis Río Colorado, Mexicali and Tijuana in the west (cf. map 1). In 2010, under the “Mexican Interior Repatriation Program” and the other bilateral U.S.-Mexico interior deportation programs that followed, people also started to be deported to the Mexican interior, often to the capital.

Map 1
Border cities to where removed Mexicans are transferred (blue points)



Source: Velasco and Coubés 2013:4. Compiled by Wojciech Wólkowski

Employers of the Grupo Beta, run by the Mexican government agency National Migration Institute since 2009, meet the deportees on the Mexican side of the border with a snack and water as well as offering them the possibility to rest in a migrant shelter (De León, 2015; Instituto Nacional de Migración, 2014). After detention in a U.S. migration prison and the humiliating transfer to Mexico (Radziwinowiczówna, 2016), the deportees are free to go.

1. Return to pre-deportation

Deportees are banned from returning to the United States. A ten-year re-entry bar is the standard punishment for an extended “unlawful presence” in the country, and this can be extended in case of reentry or a criminal record. Removed individuals have practically no chance of legal return to the U.S. during the period of the bar. The bar imposed on the former deportees from San Ángel varies from five years to a permanent ban. In view of the inability to return as authorized migrants, deported Mexicans who choose to return to the U.S. do so without authorization. “Illegal re-entry” is classified as a

federal crime and is often punished with detention (Rohal & Lopez, 2014, p. 5). Return to the U.S. is therefore an example of agency and resistance to the U.S. deportation regime (De Genova, 2010).

In 2010, six out of ten Mexican deportees were planning to return to the United States (Passel, Cohn, & Gonzalez-Barrera, 2012, p. 24), but since then this number has been decreasing. According to quantitative research by the Mexican research center Colegio de la Frontera Norte, in 2013 only 23% of Mexican deportees were planning to re-enter the U.S. immediately after deportation (Velasco & Coubés, 2013, p. 11). This change is probably due to increasingly difficult and expensive border crossings, and the criminalization of those previously removed.

Among the former deportees interviewed in San Ángel, six had returned to the U.S. at some point. Among the individuals I interviewed in 2012, two were back in the U.S. by 2013 and 2018. In 2012, I interviewed two men who had been removed after reentry and two others who had reentered the U.S. after deportation, but by the start of my research had voluntarily returned to San Ángel. Prior to the securitization of the U.S. border in the first decade of the 21st century, people often returned to the U.S. without being apprehended by the U.S. Border Patrol (BP).

Those who choose to return to the U.S. envisage the suffering resulting from their absence there. Post-deportation return to the U.S. is frequently driven by the desire to reunify with the nuclear family. Deported Mexicans often have strong roots in the U.S.: the EMIF-Norte survey (a project of Colegio de la Frontera Norte) carried out among deportees revealed that those most determined to go back had lived in the United States for over a year (Passel *et al.*, 2012, p. 22). Individuals from San Ángel who reentered the U.S. had resided in *el norte* (the North, i.e. the U.S.) for a long time and envisaged their residence there as permanent.

Between 1998 and 2007, over 100,000 removed individuals had U.S.-born children (U.S. Department of Homeland Security: Office of Inspector General, 2009, p. 6). However, since 2007, the number of removed parents has been much higher: “in the first six months of 2011, the federal government removed more than 46,000 mothers and fathers of U.S.-citizen children” (Wessler, 2011, p. 5). ICE does not collect information on whether children remain in the U.S. after their parents’ deportation (U.S. Department of Homeland Security: Office of Inspector General, 2009, p. 1), but studies demonstrate that “removal” often leads to family separation (Capps, Castañeda, Chaudry, & Santos, 2007), and even to placement of children in foster care in the U.S. (Sanmiguel-Valderrama, 2013). Parents separated from their children attempt to reunify with them — between

1998 and 2007, more than a third of parents of U.S. citizens who were removed had been previously deported and returned during the period of the re-entry ban (U.S. Department of Homeland Security: Office of Inspector General, 2009, p. 5).

Unauthorized return to the United States anticipates or counteracts the suffering caused by the family separation. Among the former deportees interviewed in San Ángel, six returned to the United States after removal, and three did so in order to reunite with their partners and children. For instance, in 2012 I interviewed Andrés, a recently removed 22-year-old man whose deportation separated him from his daughter and partner in the United States. He did not reenter the United States directly — after removal he spent two weeks in Mexico City with a sister he had not seen for a long time. In San Ángel, he met his other siblings and parents and took a construction job. In 2013, when I was planning to visit him again, my friends told me that Andrés had returned to *el norte*. This young man's case shows that post-deportation strategies are not chosen once and for all, but several can be practiced subsequently, and they are often driven by the desire to reunite with family on either side of the border.

Another reason for returning to the United States is to escape the structural violence and suffering related to poverty and unemployment. Deportees are aware of the economic hardships awaiting them in Oaxaca. Once deported to marginalized Mixteca Baja, they keenly experience unemployment or harsh labor conditions in precarious jobs similar to those that led to their migration from Mexico in the first place. Deportation equates to enduring financial instability for deportees and their (transnational) families. They are all landless and occasionally work as farmhands, or help out at construction sites, earning US\$6.50 a day, or rent a taxi from more affluent villagers who own a car and have a license. Former deportees often have no savings because they invested their money in frustrated border-crossings or in hiring immigration lawyers to appeal removal orders. This exacerbates their low economic status and curtails immigrant success stories. Those individuals whose close relatives remain in *el norte* may sometimes fall back on the financial support of these family members; however, they are also deportable.

Before deportation, 21 of the interviewees had jobs in the U.S. The case of Juan is particularly interesting. I first met him and his family in 2012, six years after he had been removed from Washington. At that time, he was living in San Ángel, had started a family there, and was running a small business with his wife. When we talked, he compared his wages in Washington with his profits in San Ángel: “What you earn there in one day, you earn here in ten days or eight working days [...] That's the downside.” Like most of

the people in the pueblo, he was very well informed about the prices that the coyotes charged (between US\$2,500-\$3,000 in 2012). When I met his wife again in 2013, she was relieved to tell me that it had not been long since he had safely arrived at his U.S. destination. By 2018, she and their two children had joined him, crossing the border without authorization.

Another deportee, Javier, was not so lucky. He attempted to re-enter the U.S. twice, but on both occasions was caught and detained. He had lived in the U.S. for 25 years; he migrated with his wife and their young child, and had three more children during his time there. After being deported for the first time in 2010, his family was unwilling to follow him to Mexico. Anticipating the suffering related to separation, he attempted to return three days after his deportation. The BP apprehended him and he was detained for three months in Florence, Arizona. He was deported again and given a ten-year reentry bar, then went to San Ángel, but only stayed for a month before attempting to cross again. This time he was lucky and managed to return to his house in Washington, only for ICE to arrest him again. He was detained for another three months in Tacoma Northwest Detention Center and granted an additional ten-year re-entry bar. As he had anticipated, after his deportation he lost contact with his family in Washington.

2. Remaining in liminality

In anthropology, liminality refers to an in-between state (Turner, 1995) – a very good description of the condition of former deportees who remain in a border city. Liminal deportees either wish to return to pre-deportation (reenter the U.S.) or to postpone their return to pre-migration (mobility to San Ángel). The first group wait for the most opportune moment to cross or do not have the economic resources to hire a coyote (De León, 2015). Sometimes their stay in the border city is prolonged due to difficulties in returning to the U.S., and because they do not have the money to go back to their Mexican places of origin.

Deportees who exceed the time limits in migrant shelters, do not make it back to the U.S., and cannot count on the support of family and friends, may give up on going back to their places of origin and end up becoming homeless in the border cities. Velasco and Coubés (2013, pp. 15–26) present a dramatic case of former deportees in Tijuana who inhabit the drainage canal called *El Bordo* (“the border” in Spanglish) (cf. pictures 1 and 2). 700 to 1,000 individuals resided there between August and September 2013 (Velasco & Coubés, 2013, p. 16).

Picture 1

El Bordo, river canalization in Tijuana



Photograph by the author

The decision to remain in a border city might be prompted by a feeling of embarrassment about returning to their hometown as a *deportado* (“deportee”). One of the former deportees in San Ángel, José (aged 27 when deported in 2009), stayed in Tijuana for three months after his deportation. A cousin of his who lived there, also a native of San Ángel, accommodated José in his house and helped him to find a job in a paint store. However, better job opportunities were not the main reason for José’s decision to stay in the border city:

José: As a matter of fact, I didn’t want to come here. I wanted to wait, because they threw me out in June-July. I was waiting for December, more or less that time.

Agnieszka: Why?

José: [laughing] You’re asking why, [laughing] Because in December you see many people coming from the United States and I didn’t want them to know that they had deported me.

Picture 2

Inhabitants of *El Bordo*, almost all of whom were deported from the United States



Photograph by the author

December visits by migrants to San Ángel have been institutionalized, since they prefer to arrive at a time associated with religious and civic rituals. Arrival at the pueblo at a different time of the year is more likely to expose them as deportees. However, shame is contextual. In Tijuana, far away from their hometown, social control is weaker and former deportees do not feel embarrassed. José stayed there for almost three months; however, he did not accomplish his goal and went to San Ángel in August. He longed to see his parents, could not afford life in Tijuana, and perceived the city as dangerous. A temporary stay in a border city is not the only way to avoid going to San Ángel immediately after deportation. Some former deportees, such as the aforementioned Andrés, head for Mexico City where they visit their relatives first.

Former deportees are aware that they cannot conceal the reason for their forced migration to San Ángel. The clues that combine to expose them include: the date of arrival (unless they are deported in December, when migrants visit the pueblo), the fact they do not bring any valuables or funds (Schuster & Majidi, 2015), and transnational gossip (Cohen, 2004). Whenever somebody is arrested in the United States, migrants inform their

relatives and friends (who, in turn, inform their own relatives and friends), and “rumors about the deportation precede their arrival” (Peutz 2010: 387). The transnational community of San Ángel is like a goldfish bowl and information about migrants quickly reaches Mexico.

Post-deportation liminality is usually temporal, as former deportees either succeed in crossing the U.S. border and return to pre-deportation or — like José — go to San Ángel. The representatives of the Mexican state want to counteract deportees’ liminality and their prolonged temporality in the border cities. The image of a criminal deportee — who, once back in Mexico, joins mafias and drug cartels operating on the border — prevails and the deportees are often blamed for violence in border cities (Kilpatrick, 2014). Local authorities encourage them to leave and travel to other Mexican destinations. In this way, Mexican officials attempt to govern the population of the recently deported, crowding them out of border cities and attempting to prevent the growth of violence on the border.

At the time the people I worked with in San Ángel were deported (between 2006 and 2012), the border cities where they arrived were not yet subsidizing bus tickets for deportees (Velasco & Coubés, 2013, p. 34). The agents of the National Migration Institute encouraged deportees to go further south, explaining that the border area was unsafe. In order to leave the dangerous city of Reynosa, Camilo, who was deported in 2011 at the age of 23, asked his U.S.-based relatives to send him money.

Camilo: The [agents] of the Mexican *Migración* [...] took us to the bus station and they told us that if we have [money] to go to some other place, we’d better go, because it is very difficult there. And if [we didn’t have money], they would give us a document,¹ so that they [our relatives] could transfer us money, so that we could buy the ticket and go to our place of origin.

Agnieszka: Why was it difficult [in Reynosa, Tamaulipas]?

Daniela [Camilo’s mother]: There are many robbers there.

Camilo: Yeah, thieves.

Daniela: Coyotes.

Camilo: Coyotes too.

1 Deportees are identified on the basis of Department of Homeland Security-issued labels on their personal belongings.

Deportees without identification documents face practical problems receiving wires. This was the case of 28-year old Toribio, deported in 2006 after having lived in the U.S. for 13 years:

Toribio: I got out [*salí*, i.e., he was deported] at 1 a.m. in Tijuana. I found a hotel. I met some guys who had an ID and my sisters sent me the money. I bought the bus ticket and I travelled here from Tijuana.

Agnieszka: Didn't you have an ID?

Toribio: No, no. I looked for somebody there with an ID so that I could collect the money.

Former deportees' often lack documentation, which contributes to their vulnerability. After being undocumented in the U.S., they lack identity documents from their country of citizenship (Radziwinowiczówna, 2014) and are thus **doubly undocumented** ("doubly wetback," cf. Coutin, 2010, p. 242). They ask a third-party to collect money wired from their relatives, and the brokers often charge high fees (De León, 2013). Acacio, deported in 2009 at the age of 24, used his identifier from an immigration detention center to identify himself at the airport in Tijuana since it was the only identification card he carried (he was allowed on the plane!). Others have no choice but to travel south by bus, so that they do not have to prove their identity.

Some of the individuals I worked with stated that they felt insecure, especially after being transferred at night to Mexico. The U.S. authorities often choose this time to transfer the Mexican deportees, who are easily recognizable by their inappropriate clothing (they are wearing whatever they were captured in) and transparent bags issued by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security; this exposes them to violence (De León, 2013). Certain parts of the Mexican borderland are particularly dangerous. Reynosa, Tamaulipas, where there has been an escalation of drug cartel violence, is one example. While Mixteca Baja is mainly free of organized crime, deportees from other parts of Mexico might be afraid of returning to more violent hometowns (Boehm, 2011). However, the fear of staying in the border cities can lead to a decision to go to some other Mexican city or back to their hometown.

The practices of U.S. immigration authorities also discourage migrants from staying in border cities and reattempting the border crossing. This is especially true of border crossers removed under the "remote repatriation" programs. The main objective of the Alien Transfer Exit Program (ATEP), a part of the U.S. immigration policy known as "Prevention Through

Deterrence” (De León, 2013, 2015), is to separate border crossers from their coyotes by “returning” them to border cities as far as 100 miles or more from where they crossed (Isacson, Meyer, & Davis, 2013, p. 5; Isacson *et al.*, 2013, p. 14). ATEP not only leads to migrants being separated from their coyotes, but also to the separation of family members. The case of Gaspar and his daughter-in-law, Rita, serves as an example. In 2012, the BP apprehended them during a border-crossing attempt. After detention, officials from the United States Customs and Border Protection split the group guided by the same coyote. The detained men and women were taken to different detention centers. Gaspar, separated in this way from his daughter-in-law, was terrified about her possible fate:

Gaspar: When *La Migra* catches you, they separate men and women. And when they take you to Mexico, they don't leave the men and women in the same place. They leave the women in one place and the men in another, farther away. She was alone, she was in danger of being raped, kidnapped; I thought: “She could be even killed!”

After deportation, Gaspar and Rita managed to find each other in Mexico. The pressure and strain caused by deportation and separation from his daughter-in-law made Gaspar give up on the idea of another border-crossing attempt, against the wishes of Rita and his U.S.-based son (her husband), an unauthorized immigrant, who were waiting to be reunited. Although Rita wanted to try to cross the border again, her father-in-law was empowered to decide for the two of them. Rita never did reunite with her husband and two years later they separated. When this occurred, Rita and her daughters moved out of her in-laws' house and experienced considerable financial insecurity. Her two daughters, by then teenagers, moved out to live with their boyfriends and started their own families shortly thereafter.

3. Return to pre-migration

The third post-deportation strategy, which I call “return to pre-migration” consists of returning to a place and – often – a situation that an individual experienced before migration to the U.S. By “situation” I mean family, work, and accommodation configurations. “Return to pre-migration” may consist of going to San Ángel or to a different place where an individual resided before migration to the U.S. In San Ángel, like in many other Mexican communities, there were intensive migrations to Mexico City and the state of Mexico.

Former deportees head for the metropolitan areas that they already know and where they can count on support from other people from San Ángel.

Their friends and relatives facilitate their accommodation and support them in their search for a job. This strategy is chosen by those former deportees whose nuclear families do not live in San Ángel. The case of César, deported in 2008 at the age of 30 after having lived in the United States for 11 years, is an example. His wife and two U.S.-born children did not follow him to Mexico, and after his deportation he headed for the state of Mexico, where he had lived before migration to the United States. There, he moved in with his relative from San Ángel. He returned to the same workplace where he had worked before migrating. As a flour distributor, he had to carry two 100-pound sacks on his back at a time. He soon suffered a spinal disc herniation that needed surgery. Luckily, he had medical insurance, in contrast to 65% of the Mexican deportees (Fernández-Niño *et al.*, 2014), but did not receive compensation from his employer. The case of César is the embodiment of social suffering (Tapias, 2006) related to structural factors. After the surgery, he decided to move to San Ángel, where he owned a taxi, which he bought when he was living in Oregon.

César's case also demonstrates that deportation can result in the re-establishment of affective ties severed by U.S.-ward migration. Before his migration in 1997, César had a child with Anastasia, whom he met in the state of Mexico. They split up when he migrated and he started a new family in Oregon. After his deportation, they got together again. However, their adolescent son did not approve of the relationship, and when they chose to move to San Ángel, he refused to go and chose to stay with his aunt, Anastasia's sister.

Individuals who head directly for San Ángel after deportation often have nuclear families back in the village, and maintain contact with them during their migration. According to Velasco and Coubés (2013, p. 12), those who choose to go directly back to their hometowns tend not to have been in the U.S. for very long. Thus, they may treat deportation as an opportunity to visit their hometown. For instance, Alejandro, who used to work for one to three years in New York City and then return to San Ángel for a month or two, went directly to the pueblo after deportation to reunite with his family.

However, during my fieldwork in San Ángel I also found examples of single men in their twenties who were deported alone, leaving behind their parents and siblings in the United States. They also traveled directly to San Ángel, disoriented and perplexed to be back in Mexico (which they had left as children) even though they counted on support from their relatives. This was the case of Camilo, whose deportation in 2011 separated him from his parents and younger brothers. He migrated, or rather was "placed" (Boehm 2012) by his parents in Las Vegas at the age of 11. He had lived in the

United States for 12 years, and imagined Mexico as an unsafe and abusive place. His post-deportation experiences in Reynosa confirmed his fears:

Camilo: As a matter of fact, Mexican *Migración* [the officers of the National Migration Institute] took us to a money exchange office where they gave us very little for the dollars, and at the bus station the rate was much higher. I mean, from the beginning, they started to cheat us.

For young people with no experiences of mobility before migrating to the United States, heading for their hometown may be the safest option. San Ángel is free from organized violence, and the corrupt state practically has no presence there. In Mixteca Baja there have been no cases of state violence like those reported in other parts of Mexico (Gibler, 2017). In the case of deportees from more violent parts of Mexico, return to pre-migration is not necessarily the safest option.

Coutin (2010, p. 362), who worked with people deported to El Salvador, observed that in many cases there is no one awaiting deportees in their place of origin. In San Ángel, though, I did not observe any such cases. The villagers host deportees, first because of transnational practices of familyhood (Stephen, 2007), and second because of the strong norm of generosity that virtually forbids avoidance of responsibility. In cases where deportees are not accompanied by their nuclear family, relatives from the extended family provide assistance. For instance, Acacio's uncle picked him up at the airport and hosted him until the younger man got back together (*se juntó*) with the woman with whom he had a child before migrating. The couple and their son then moved to his parents' house. Meanwhile Camilo, whose parents and siblings also remained in the U.S., moved into his uncle's house. When his parents were likewise deported and brought their two younger children to San Ángel, the whole nuclear family was reconstructed in the pueblo. None of the former deportees live alone in San Ángel; even if their nuclear families stayed in *el norte*, they joined already established households (moving into a [grand]parent's or an aunt or uncle's house).

For deportees who left relatives behind in the U.S., removal results in separations: it tears apart spouses, parents, and children. In the transnational community of San Ángel, deportations have fragmented nine families. "Social relations [...] have always been reconstituted translocally" (Boehm, Hess, Coe, Rae-Espinoza, & Reynolds, 2011, p. 10), but the deported fathers from San Ángel often lose contact with their spouses and offspring who stay in the U.S. It should be noted, however, that relations between children and deported fathers are not fixed, but changeable. In spite of the initial loss of contact with U.S.-based children, some con-

tacts are reestablished and attempts are made to work out transnational fathering practices.

Six former deportees started new families in Mexico and arranged their future there. With the passage of time, some former deportees are able to reconstruct a fragile stability back in San Ángel. For those former deportees whose families do not follow them to Mexico and who do not reunify with formerly-abandoned families, coming to San Ángel is a “return to pre-migration” bordering on a “new beginning” in terms of their family situation.

4. A new beginning

Deportation is always a new beginning since many facets of lives (family, labor, social) change with forced removal (Boehm, 2016). Here, however, I would like to focus on the cases of individuals who relocated to a new place after the deportation.

Post-deportation internal mobility in Mexico can have various causes. Deportation researchers describe cases of former deportees who settle in border cities in order to be close to their loved ones (París Pombo, Buenrostro Mercado, & Pérez Duperou 2017). If their relatives are lawful immigrants or U.S. citizens, they can visit deportees in Mexico, a strategy that attenuates the post-deportation suffering caused by family separation. In 2011, Amada and Fidel, who longed for reunification with their sons, moved with their two-year old daughter to Piedras Negras, a city on the U.S. border. They wanted their sons to move there and commute across the border to schools in Eagle Pass, Texas. However, the boys opposed another migration and the separation from their friends in Iowa that this would entail.

Once in Piedras Negras, Fidel worked as a peddler, but sometimes he did not feel safe walking the streets with his merchandise:

Fidel: We were fine [financially] on the border, you know. But later I started to realize that there was crime, that there were drug cartels. So I said, “No, I’d better return, I’m safer in my hometown in Oaxaca than in Piedras Negras.” Here, for example, there is no work, but I have a house, I have my furniture, I have a bed. I have everything. And there I didn’t have furniture, nothing. I had to start over again.

Six months later, when the couple realized that their sons would not move to Coahuila, Fidel, Amada, and Noemí returned to San Ángel. Their post-deportation trajectory consisted of going to the hometown (the third strategy), moving to the border (the fourth strategy) and again migrating to San Ángel.

A new beginning might also mean mobility in order to take advantage of better job opportunities in other parts of Mexico. Mobility to the capital, where work opportunities are much better than in Mixteca Baja, may be a good option. Other authors describe cases of former deportees who, in view of their inability to return to the U.S. decide to stay in a Mexican border city and take advantage of better job opportunities than those available in their place of origin. Romero Loyola (2012) describes the case of deportees who take jobs at call centers in Tijuana. Many of them had migrated to the U.S. as children and are fluent in English. After their removal, they find jobs in call centers in Baja California that serve U.S. customers. There are at least 35 call centers in this Mexican state, employing 13,000 people. As some of them find jobs, accommodations, and create a family in Mexican border cities, they settle down; for them, living in a border city represents a “new beginning” rather than “remaining in liminality.”

At the call centers, deportees’ English skills, past experience working in the U.S., and knowledge of U.S. culture are valuable assets, but they are paid much less than in *el norte*. Looking for a job in holiday resorts that attract English-speaking guests is another option for a “new beginning.” In the case of Camilo, after his deportation in 2011 he went to San Ángel, as explained above, where his family reunified when his parents were deported. Back in Mixteca Baja, the family suffered financial insecurity and in 2017 decided to go to Quintana Roo, where they all found employment at a holiday resort in Cancún.

Concluding remarks

In this article, I have proposed a typology of post-deportation strategies of Mexicans deported from the United States. The word “strategy” implies a plan of action to accomplish a specific goal. Through the use of this term, I wanted to underline the agency of the former deportees, their desire to shape their trajectories, and even to resist the power of the U.S. that led to their deportation. However, the cases of the people described here show that their opportunities are, to a vast extent, circumscribed by the U.S. deportation regime. It incarcerates and removes apprehended deportees with longer re-entry bars and makes their significant others’ visits to Mexico impossible if they themselves are unauthorized migrants. The U.S. deportation regime even permeates the Mexican border and attaches a stigma to the status of a *deportado*. Consequently, post-deportation suffering is shaped by the U.S. deportation regime even after the removal itself.

To reiterate, I suggested considering post-deportation strategies as mobility considering or toward situations and not toward physical places *per se*, since the removal of former deportees does not necessarily translate into “going back home.” Four different strategies can be used: 1) return to pre-deportation; 2) remaining in liminality; 3) returning to pre-migration; and 4) a new beginning. Former deportees’ decisions concerning mobility take into account their suffering, or its anticipation. This is either suffering driven by separation from their families, economic hardships, or the fear of violence and insecurity.

Two main reasons lead to return to pre-deportation: suffering related to family separation and economic hardships anticipated or already suffered back in Mexico. Although reentry is classified as a federal crime in the U.S., six former deportees who participated in this research employed this post-deportation strategy. Before the securitization of the U.S. border, post-deportation re-entry was more common and often undertaken for economic reasons. Currently, however, given the increasing risk of apprehension, this strategy is mainly driven by a desperate desire to reunify with the family. Individuals who return to the United States not only demonstrate their agency after their transfer to Mexico, but also undertake an act of resistance against the deporting state.

A new beginning is undertaken in locations with more competitive labor markets, or is the result of a desire to be closer to relatives who remain in the U.S. Remaining in liminality might serve as a way for migrants to avoid the shame and the stigma of returning to their “hometown.” Two main motives lead to returning to pre-migration: the desire to reunite with the family (if a deportee has close relatives in San Ángel), and a conviction about the inability to return to the United States. What is more, strategies of mobility are not chosen once and for all, as an individual can subsequently make different types of post-deportation decisions.

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